

Mission San Juan De Capistrano, Convent  
Berg's Mill-Graf Road  
Berg's Mill Community  
San Antonio  
Bexar County  
Texas

HABS No. TX-321 B

HABS

Tex

IS-SANT.V,

36-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

MISSION SAN JUAN DE CAPISTRANO,  
CONVENT

HABS  
TEX  
15-SANT.V,  
39-  
HABS No. TX-321 B

Location: Berg's Mill-Graf Road, Berg's Mill Community, San Antonio,  
Bexar County, Texas.

Present Owner: Roman Catholic Archdiocese of San Antonio.

Present Use: Public Museum.

Significance: The convent is the first permanent San Juan mission building and is a typical component of a Spanish mission complex built during the period of Texas frontier.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: Circa 1744.
2. Original and subsequent owners: See History section of Mission San Juan de Capistrano, HABS No. TX-321.
3. Alterations and additions: In about 1756 the convent appears to have been enlarged, for it was described at that time as having three private rooms, an office, refectory and kitchen.

Apparently other changes and additions took place during the ensuing years, and by the time of Fray Morfi's visit in 1777, the building consisted of "four cells with a gallery, two offices, a refectory, kitchen and workshop."

The convent building has suffered many changes since the secularization of the Mission in 1794 but there is little information available for these years. It was made apparent, however, by excavations in the 1930s that extensive foundations exist adjacent and in proximity to this building, and it is therefore difficult to conjecture as to which portion of the old convent the present building should be attributed.

- B. Historical Context: See Mission San Juan de Capistrano, HABS No. TX-321.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The convent building is a simple, unpretentious one-story oblong stone structure located just south of and oriented roughly parallel to the chapel.
2. Condition of fabric: The walls are presently in fair condition.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The building is about 19' x 77'-6".
2. Foundation: Although the foundations are indeterminable it seems certain that they are rubble stone and lime mortar and that they are simply the lower masonry courses of the exterior walls.
3. Walls: Rubble stone and lime mortar; stuccoed.
4. Structural system, framing: Load bearing walls with timber lintels over all openings; wood framed roof.
5. Porch: There are no porches on this building, although excavations made during the 1930s proved that a cloister originally ran the length of the east facade.
6. Openings:
  - a. Doorways and doors: There are presently four doorways, with varying dimensions but all essentially having the same characteristic splay to the inside and spanned by wood post lintels. There is only one door and it is located in the south end of the east facade. It is a recent board door.
  - b. Windows: There are three rectangular window openings: one in each end wall; one in the south part of the west facade. All openings are spanned by wood post lintels and have no windows.
  - c. Roof: Gabled with corrugated metal covering.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plan: The building is one large oblong room.
2. Flooring: The present floor of the convent, not original, consists of modern 12" x 12" red quarry tile laid with cement mortar on the ground. It is likely that the original floor was a hard-packed earth or clay surface.
3. Wall and ceiling finish: Walls are presently stuccoed with modern cement and whitewashed. The stucco is in poor condition.
4. Doors: No interior doors.
5. Mechanical equipment: There are neither lighting nor heating fixtures in the building.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The convent is located just south of the chapel building, separated from it by twenty feet of open ground. Like the chapel, the convent is situated on the brow of the slope down to the east bank of the San Antonio River.

Prepared by: John C. Garner, Jr.  
Director, Bexar County  
Architecture Survey  
1969

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

The San Antonio project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) in the summer of 1968, and was made possible with funds from HABS and two sponsors, the Bexar County Historical Survey Committee and the San Antonio Conservation Society. Under the direction of James Massey, chief of HABS, the project was carried out by Wesley I. Shank (Iowa State University), project supervisor, and by student assistant architects, Charles W. Barrow (University of Texas); Les Beilinson (University of Miami); William H. Edwards (University of Illinois); and Larry D. Hermesen (Iowa State University) at the HABS field office in the former Ursuline Academy buildings, San Antonio. John C. Garner, Jr., director of Bexar County Architecture Survey, did the outside work on the written documentaries. Susan McCown, a HABS staff historian in the Washington, D.C. office, edited the written data in 1983, for preparation of transmittal to the Library of Congress. Dewey G. Mears of Austin, Texas took the documentary photographs of the San Antonio structures.

The 1983 photographs of the convent are part of the 1983 San Antonio Missions project, which was sponsored by the Southwest Regional Office, National Park Service. John Lowe of the HABS/HAER Office, Washington, D.C., took the photographs.